

THE REAL MAN

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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CHAPTER XV—Continued.

Smith was jabbing his paper knife absently into the desk blotter. "And yet we go on calling this a civilized country!" he said meditatively. Then with a sudden change of front: "I'm in this fight to stay until I win out or die out, Billy; you know that. As I have said, Miss Verda can kill me off if she chooses to; but she won't choose to. Now let's get to work. It's pretty late to rout a justice of the peace out of bed to issue a warrant for us, but we'll do it. Then we'll go after Lanterby and make him turn state's evidence. Come on; let's get busy."

But Starbuck, reaching softly for a chair-righting handhold upon Smith's desk, made no reply. Instead he snapped his lithe body out of the chair and launched it in a sudden tiger spring at the door. To Smith's astonishment, the door, which should have been latched, came in at Starbuck's wrenching jerk of the knob, bringing with it, hatless, and with the breath startled out of him, the new stenographer, Shaw.

"There's your state's evidence," said Starbuck grimly, pushing the half-dazed door listener into a chair. "Just put the auger a couple of inches into this fellow and see what you can find."

Richard Shaw had an exceedingly bad quarter of an hour when Smith and Starbuck applied the thumbscrews to force a confession out of him. Nevertheless, knowing the dangerous ground upon which he stood, he evaded and shuffled and prevaricated under the charges and questionings until it became apparent that nothing short of bribery or physical torture would get the truth out of him. Smith was not willing to offer the bribe, and since the literal thumbscrews were out of the question, Shaw was locked into one of the vacant rooms across the corridor until his captors could determine what was to be done with him.

"That is one time when I fired and missed the whole side of the barn," Starbuck admitted, when Shaw had been remanded to the makeshift cell across the hall. "I know that fellow is on Stanton's pay roll; and it's reasonably certain that he got his job with you so that he could keep cases on you. But we can't prove anything that we say, so long as he refuses to talk."

"No," Smith agreed. "I can discharge him, and that's about all that can be done with him."

"He is a pretty smooth article," said Starbuck reflectively. "He used to be a clerk in Maxwell's railroad office, and he was mixed up in some kind of crookedness, I don't remember just what."

Smith caught quickly at the suggestion.

"Wait a minute, Billy," he broke in; and then: "There's no doubt in your mind that he's a spy?"

"Sure he is," was the prompt rejoinder.

"I was just thinking—he has heard what was said here tonight—which is enough to give Stanton a pretty good chance to outfigure our outfit again."

"Right you are."

"In which case it would be little short of idiotic in us to turn him loose. We've got to hold him, proof or no proof. Where would we be apt to catch Maxwell at this time of night?"

"At home and in bed, I reckon."

"Call him upon the phone and state the case briefly. Tell him if he has any nip on Shaw that would warrant us in turning him over to the sheriff, we'd like to know it."

"You're getting the range now," laughed the ex-cowman, and instead of using the desk set, he went to shut himself into the sound-proof telephone closet.

When he emerged a few minutes later he was grinning exultantly. "That was sure a smooth one of yours, John. Dick gave me the facts. Shaw's a thief; but he has a sick sister on his hands—or said he had—and the railroad didn't prosecute. Dick says for us to jug him tonight and tomorrow morning he'll swear out the necessary papers."

"Good. We'll do that first; and then we'll go after this fellow Lanterby. I want to get Stanton where I can pinch him, Billy; no, there's nothing personal about it; but when a great corporation like the Escalante Land company goes down to plain anarchy and dynamiting, it's time to make somebody sweat for it. Let's go and get Shaw."

Together they went across the corridor, and Smith unlocked the door of the disused room. The light switch was on the door-jamb and Starbuck found and pressed the button. The single incandescent bulb hanging from

the ceiling sprang alive—and showed the two men at the door an empty room and an open window. The bird had flown.

Starbuck was grinning again when he went to look out of the window. The roof of the adjoining building was only a few feet below the sill level, and there was a convenient fire escape ladder leading to the ground.

"It's us for that roadhouse out on the Topaz trail before the news gets around to Stanton and Lanterby," he said definitely; and they lost no time in securing an auto for the dash.

But that, too, proved to be a fiasco. When they reached Barton's all-night place on the hill road, the bar was still open and a card game was running in an upstairs room. Starbuck did the necessary cross-questioning of the dog-faced bartender.

"You know me, Pug, and what I can do to you if I have to. We want Hank Lanterby. Pitch out and show us where."

The barkeeper threw up one hand as if he were warding off a blow.

"You c'd have him in a holy minute, for all o' me, Billy; you sure could," he protested. "But he's gone."

"On the level?" snapped Starbuck.

"That's straight; I wouldn't lie to you, Billy. Telephone call came from town a little spell ago, and I got Hank outa bed t' answer it. He borra'd Barton's mare an' faded inside of a pair o' minutes."

"Which way?" demanded the questioner.

"T' the hills; leastways he ain't headin' f'r town when he breaks from here."

Starbuck turned to Smith with a wry smile.

"Shaw beat us to it and he scores on us," he said. "We may as well hike back, 'phone Williams to keep his eye on things up at the dam, and go to bed. There'll be nothing more doing tonight."

CHAPTER XVI.

At Any Cost.

With all things moving favorably for Timanyoni High Line up to the night of fiascos, the battle for the great water-right seemed to take a sudden slant against the local promoters, after the failure to cripple Stanton by the attempt to suppress two of his subordinates. Early the next day there were panicky rumors in the air, none of them traceable to any definite starting point.

One of the stories was to the effect that the Timanyoni dam had faulty foundations and that the haste in building had added to its insecurity. On the heels of this came clamorous court petitions from ranch owners below the dam site, setting forth the flood dangers to which they were exposed and praying for an injunction to stop the work.

That this was a new move on Stanton's part, neither Smith nor Stillings questioned for a moment; but they no sooner got the nervous ranchmen pacified by giving an indemnity bond for any damage that might be done, than other rumors sprang up. For one day and yet another Smith fought mechanically, developing the machinelike doggedness of the soldier who sees the battle going irresistibly against him and still smites on in sheer desperation. He saw the carefully built organization structure, reared by his own efforts upon the foundation laid by Colonel Baldwin and his ranchman associates, falling to pieces. In spite of all he could do, there was a panic of stock-selling; the city council, alarmed by the persistent story of the unsafety of the dam, was threatening to cancel the lighting contract with Timanyoni High Line; and Kinzie, though he was doing nothing openly, had caused the word to be passed far and wide among the Timanyoni stockholders, disaster could be averted now only by prompt action and the swift effacement of their rule-or-ruin secretary and treasurer.

"They're after you, John," was the way the colonel put it at the close of the second day of back-slippings. "They say you're fiddlin' while Rome's a-burnin'. Maybe you know what they mean by that; I don't."

Smith did know. During the two days of stress Miss Verda had been very exacting. There had been another night at the theater and much time-killing after meals in the parlors of the Hopra house. Worse still, there had been a daylight auto trip about town and up to the dam. The victim was writhing miserably under the price-paying, but there seemed to be no help for it. Since the night of Verda Richlander's arrival in Brewster, he had not seen Corona; he was telling himself that he had forfeited the right to see

her. Out of the chaotic wreck of things but one driving motive had survived, and it had grown to the stature of an obsession: the determination to wring victory out of defeat for Timanyoni High Line; to fall, if he must fall, fighting to the last gasp and with his face to the enemy.

"I know," he said, replying, after the reflective pause, to the charge passed on by Colonel Dexter. "There is a friend of mine here from the East, and I have been obliged to show her some attention, so they say I am neglecting my job. They are also talking it around that I am your Jonah, and saying that your only hope is to pitch me overboard."

"That's Dave Kinzie," growled the Missourian. "He seems to have it in for you, some way."

"Nevertheless, he was right," Smith returned gloomily. Then: "I am about at the end of my rope, colonel—the rope I warned you about when you brought me here and put me into the saddle; and I'm trying desperately to hang on until my job's done. When it is done, when Timanyoni High Line can stand fairly on its own feet and fight its own battles, I'm gone."

"Oh, no, you're not," denied the ranchman-president in generous protest. "You come on out home with me tonight and get away from this muddle for a few minutes. It'll do you a heap of good; you know it always does."

Smith shook his head reluctantly but firmly.

"Never again, colonel. It can only be a matter of a few days now, and I'm not going to pull you and your wife and daughter into the limelight if I can help it."

Colonel Dexter got out of his chair and walked to the office window. When he came back it was to say: "Are they sure-enough chasing you, John?—for something that you have done? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"That is it—and they are nearly here. Now you know at least one of the reasons why I can't go with you tonight."

"I'll be shot if I do!" stormed the generous one. "I promised the missus I'd bring you."

"You must make my excuses to her; and to Corona you may say that I am once more carrying a gun. She will understand."

"Which means, I take it, that you've been telling Corry more than you've told the rest of us. That brings on more talk, John. I haven't said a word before, have I?"

"No."

"Well, I'm going to say it now: I've got only just one daughter in the wide, wide world, John."

Smith stood up and put his hands behind him, facing the older man squarely.

"Colonel, I'd give ten years of my life, this minute, if I might go with you to Hillcrest this evening and tell Corona what I have been wanting to tell her ever since I have come to know what her love might make of me. The fact that I can't do it is the bitterest thing I have ever had to face, or can ever be made to face."

Colonel Baldwin fell back into his swing-chair and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"It beats the Dutch how things tangle themselves up for us poor mortals every little while," he commented, after a frowning pause. And then: "You haven't said anything like that to Corry, have you?"

"No."

"That was white, anyway. And now I suppose the other woman—this Miss Rich—has come and dug you up and got you on the end of her trailing rope. That's the way it goes when a man mixes and mingles too much. You never can tell."

"Hold on," Smith interposed. "Whatever else I may be, I'm not that kind of a scoundrel. I don't owe Miss Richlander anything that I can't pay without doing injustice to the woman I love. But in another way I am a scoundrel, colonel. For the past two days I have been contemptible enough to play upon a woman's vanity merely for the sake of keeping her from talking too much."

The grizzled old ranchman shook his head sorrowfully.

"I didn't think that of you, John; I sure didn't. Why, that's what you might call a low-down, tin-horn sort of a game."

"It is just that, and I know it as well as you do. But it's the price I have to pay for my few days of grace. Miss Richlander knows the Stanions; they've made it their business to get acquainted with her. One word from her to Crawford Stanton, and a wife

from him to my home town in the middle West would settle me."

The older man straightened himself in his chair, and his steel-gray eyes blazed suddenly.

"Break away from 'em, John!" he urged. "Break it off short, and let 'em all do their worst! Away along at the first, Williams and I both said you wasn't a crooked crook, and I'm believing it yet. When it comes to the show-down, we'll all fight for you, and they'll have to snatch a derrick along if they want to bring you out of the Timanyoni. You go over yonder to the Hopra House and tell that young woman that the bride's off, and she can talk all she wants to!"

"No," said Smith shortly. "I know what I am doing, and I shall go on as I have begun. It's the only way. Matters are desperate enough with us now, and if I should drop out—"

The telephone bell was ringing, and Baldwin twisted his chair to bring himself within reach of the desk set. The message was a brief one, and at its finish the ranchman-president was frowning heavily.

"By Jupiter! it does seem as if the bad luck all comes in a bunch!" he protested. "Williams was rushing things just a little too fast, and they've lost a whole section of the dam by stripping the forms before the concrete was set. That puts us back another twenty-four hours, at least. Don't that beat the mischief?"

Smith reached for his hat. "It's six o'clock," he said; "and Williams' form-strippers have furnished one more reason why I shouldn't keep Miss Richlander waiting for her dinner." And with that he cut the talk short and went his way.

With a blank evening before her, Miss Richlander, making the tete-a-tete dinner count for what it would, tightened her hold upon the one man available, demanding excitement. Nothing else offering, she suggested an evening auto drive, and Smith dutifully telephoned Maxwell, the railroad superintendent, and borrowed a runabout.

Smith drove the borrowed runabout in sober silence, and the glorious beauty in the seat beside him did not try to make him talk. Perhaps she, too, was busy with thoughts of her own. At all events, when Smith had helped her out of the car at the hotel entrance and had seen her as far as the elevator, she thanked him half absently and took his excuse, that he must return the runabout to Maxwell's garage, without laying any further commands upon him.

Just as he was turning away, a bell-boy came across from the clerk's desk with a telegram for Miss Richlander. Smith had no excuse for lingering, but with the air thick with threats he made the tipping of the boy answer for a momentary stop-gap. Miss Verda tore the envelope open and read the inclosure with a fine-lined little frown coming and going between her eyes.

"It's from Tucker Jibbey," she said, glancing up at Smith. "Someone has told him where we are, and he is following us. He says he'll be here on the evening train. Will you meet him and tell him I've gone to bed?"

At the mention of Jibbey, the money-spilled son of the man who stood next to Josiah Richlander in the credit ratings, and Lawrenceville's best imitation of a flaneur, Smith's first emotion was one of relief at the thought that Jibbey would at least divide time with him in the entertainment of the bored beauty; then he remembered that Jibbey had once considered him a rival, and that the sham "rounder's" presence in Brewster would constitute a menace more threatening than all the others put together.

"I can't meet Tucker," he said bluntly. "You know very well I can't."

"That's so," was the quiet reply. "Of course you can't. What will you do when he comes?—run away?"

"No; I can't do that, either. I shall keep out of his way, if I can. If he finds me and makes any bad breaks, he'll get what's coming to him. If he's worth anything to you, you'll put him on the stage in the morning and send him up into the mountains to join your father."

"The idea!" she laughed. "He's not coming out here to see father. Poor Tucker! If he could only know what he is in for!" Then: "It is beginning to look as if you might have to go still deeper in debt to me, Montague. There is one more thing I'd like to do before I leave Brewster. If I'll promise to keep Tucker away from you, will you drive me out to the Baldwins' tomorrow afternoon? I want to see the colonel's fine horses, and he has invited me, you know."

Smith's eyes darkened.

"There is a limit, Verda, and you've reached it," he said quickly. "If the colonel invited you to Hillcrest, it was because you didn't leave him any chance not to. I resign in favor of Jibbey," and with that he handed her into the waiting elevator and said, "Good-night."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Awful Serious.

"I hear your mamma is sick," said a neighbor to small Margie. "Has she got anything serious?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Margie. "She's got a doctor that is awful serious."



WILL CAST MONSTER INGOT

Immense Lump of Steel Is to Be Turned Into New Type of Sixteen-Inch Naval Gun.

There has just been cast at the Bethlehem steel works a monster ingot for the first of the 16-inch rifles that are to arm the great new battle cruisers of the United States navy, under construction at Camden. So far as known, writes a Bethlehem (Pa.) correspondent of the Philadelphia Record, the foremost ship of this class now afloat is the British cruiser Lion, with engines of 110,000 horse power. Her speed is a bit better than 40 miles an hour and she carries 14-inch guns. The American battle cruisers will have engines of 200,000 horse power and each will be armed with four 16-inch rifles, which will shoot 20 miles. From present indications there will be six of them and Bethlehem has the order for all the guns, which will be the largest on any ships of this kind in any navy.

The ingot required the contents of three open-hearth furnaces, being 15 feet 7 inches long, 100 inches in diameter and weighing 310,000 pounds. It will take several weeks to cool such an enormous mass of metal, after which it will be cut, bored and hollow forged on the great armor plate press into a tube 80 feet long. It is proposed to finish these 16-inch guns in record time in the new gun shop, which is wide enough to turn the tube around, with room to spare. Special lathes and other machinery had to be constructed to handle these guns, whose parts, such as jackets, rings and yokes, are already being forged.

Speaking of Eggs.

Little Genevieve lived with her grandmother out on the desert on a homestead where company was a rare thing. When some one did come she was almost overcome with joy.

Sometimes an automobile load would stop to rest on their way through the country. One day a beautiful brown-eyed lady stopped for a while. Genevieve and she were having an interesting time together.

Finally Genevieve said "you have pretty eyes."

"Have I," said the lady. "Thank you."

"Yes," said Genevieve, "the yolks of them are brown, just like mine."

So, She Nagged Some More.

Mrs. Nag—I'm not myself at all this morning.

Mr. N.—Then we'll have a good time.

Woman's Way.

Hubby—I was in six different sales-rooms today looking at autos.

Wifey—Did you get samples?

"In most cases of Dyspepsia Coffee Does Not Agree"—

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Many who use coffee—not knowing that it aggravates stomach troubles—could still enjoy a delicious hot table beverage and escape coffee's effects by a change to the wholesome, pure cereal drink—

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